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Performance begins to have its effect long before the encounter with it, beginning with the first thing we read or hear about it, which may even be more memorable than the work itself; and its work continues in the thoughts and conversations that take place afterward: dialogues and exchanges that may be responding to written accounts as much as to experiences of the work themselves. Critical writing is part of this cycle of making and imagining. It can shape the contexts in which work is made and received, playing not just a responsive role but actively shaping how and what it is possible to make, see, do, and say. And critical writing is also shaped by the circumstances in which it is written, as part of systems of production and distribution.

It's not a surprise, then, that performance festivals and likeminded artist collectives have increasingly explored the possibilities for developing critical writing frameworks around their practices; and have done so in ways that do not necessarily mimic the conventions of mainstream criticism, but instead test forms that are as experimental as the practices to which they relate, often involving 'live' writing that responds *in situ* with immediate methods of dissemination. Examples include a series of responsive writing programmes over several iterations of the SPILL Festival (UK); the initiative by NextWave festival (Australia) to publish a 'magazine' rather than a 'programme', and in particular its publication *Blak Wave* written by and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists (Hale and Moar 2014); *Live Press* at the 2017 Performance Arcade (Aotearoa/New Zealand), in conjunction with Performing, Writing, which published a new 'gazette' every six hours of the festival; or collective initiatives such as BELLYFLOP, Dialogue, Something Other, and more. (See 'References' for links to these.)

I've been involved as a convener or contributor to some of these initiatives, and have run workshops over a number of years in critical writing practice in various contexts that have included artists, scholars, and publics. This article distils some of the themes that have been useful to me in those workshops and settings, and is intended as a practical guide or provocation that might be used by writers or workshop leaders to cultivate their own critical writing projects. In compiling it for the page, I have taken inspiration from Della Pollock's 1995 paper on 'Performative Writing' at the inaugural conference for the organisation that would become Performance Studies international, in which Pollock enumerates, as suggestion rather than prescription, the qualities of performative writing through a series of declarations of the form 'Performative writing is …' (Pollock [1995] 1998). As such, it is itself also an example of performative writing, drawn from my own experiences, and offered with curiosity towards the ways in which these words might meet your own experience of reading.

Critical writing is _____ an event

Critical writing is not just about *an event, but is itself is an encounter between writer and work, between reader and text.*

In the 1990s the concept of 'performance writing' opened a way to think about the event of writing, foregrounding 'the transformative play of text as performance' (Allsopp 1999:79) and the conflicts and tensions that writing may manifest at the level of form, not just content (Bergvall 1996). Such an approach emphasizes 'writing as *doing*' as much as 'writing as meaning' (Pollock [1995] 1998:75). As a propositional term, 'performance writing' invites writing that interrogates the way in which meaning

is assembled: the presentation of the text as textuality, its texture and weft; its relation to authority (claimed or abdicated); and the interweaving of self-reflection on the act of writing itself.

Critical writing is a particular kind of writing in that it typically sits in relation to some other event. Adrian Heathfield (2006) uses the idea of the 'event-text' to think about this relationship: 'This writing is not simply upon a subject or about it but, rather, is "of" it in the sense that it issues from it, is subject to its force and conditions,' he writes. In his description, such writing is compelled by the event and is a continuation of it: it 'emerges from an imperative in the event' (179). Like Heathfield's distinction between writing 'of' the subject and writing 'upon' or 'about' it, Jane Rendell (2010) highlights the role of the preposition, drawing on a lineage of feminist criticism. Rendell suggests that rather than the object being 'under' the critical gaze of the writing, or the writing being 'about' the object, that one might write instead 'as', 'to', or 'with' the object, or to 'invent a writing that is somehow "like" the artwork' (7).

> it is the fluidity of **between**
> where i lose my **on**,
> the in of **to**.
> then, seeking **with**,
> the **among** of **for**,
> we slip **through**
> and reach **beyond**.
>
> (Rendell and Wells 2001:137)

How might my writing honour or acknowledge the event it describes? How might it continue its resonances and reverberations?

There are numerous examples of writing that attempts this event-quality, caught up in the wake and energy of performance as a continued reverberation of it. The deliberate or circumstantial presence of a temporal constraint seems to amplify this quality; I am thinking, for example, about the cumulative effect of C. Carr's writings for the *Village Voice*, later compiled in anthology form (Carr 2008), that track the hot intensity of the New York performance art scene in in the 1980s and 1990s, frequently taking as its example what she describes as 'some incandescent one-time only event' (xiii) in which the singularity of the event, but also that of a whole 'scene', radiates through her writing.

Or in my own experience, I recall an initiative from ten years ago, collectively undertaken by myself, Tim Atack, Rachel Lois Clapham, and Mary Paterson, in response to the now-defunct (UK) National Review of Live Art (NRLA). We had all been supported by the Live Art UK initiative 'Writing from Live Art', and we felt a need to introduce a space for critical writing and reflection into the festival environment. The NRLA was notorious for its dense saturation of experience, with multiple simultaneous artworks throughout the day and late into the night, but did not feature any space for discussion or reflection. We committed to write each day, after the performances finished in the early hours of the morning, and to compile our writing into a photocopied collection as a 'flash publication' that would be distributed the next afternoon under the gently prodding title *We Need to Talk about Live Art* (Atack et al. 2008).

This was, of course, a reckless undertaking, in which we barely had time to proofread and compile our writing, and as such exposed some of the risks of 'event-writing'. But in its proximity to event, I think that the writing could not help but be marked by the energy and urgency of the work, while also redirecting it. This was no more so the case than in a particularly astounding work by Atack (2008)

written in relation to Harminder Singh Judge's *Live Sermon*, a quasi-religious incantation in which Judge uses his mouth and breath to manipulate the sound emanating from a tiny speaker in his esophagus, to which Atack responds with a single sentence of some 850 words, undulating and weaving through visions with the same temporal insistence as Judge's performance:

> […] words falling like dominoes, spiralling away in preordained sequences, rising to god, reaching to you, feeling for your collar, wanting to hold your hand, and Judge is its vessel, beneath a single spotlight, head tilted back, in the service of whatever it is you care to imagine, however you picture it, hands clasped at his sides and the knuckles occasionally twitching, eyes full of a half-dead resolution, a general acceptance, like he does this all the time, like he does this all the fucking time, standing in this moonfull of milk, this white roundel, altar, temple, tabernacle, this slight ablution, holy river, petri dish, just enough to contain him, a pool of liquid and light, the rest of the room dark, the rest just void, void but for you and me […]
>
> (reprinted in Atack 2008)

Critical writing makes (a) public

Critical writing addresses a reader, and in so doing, creates its public. It is intentional more than argumentative: it matters that it is intended for someone.

There is no such thing as a public that exists independently of the way it is addressed: as a general public, or as an audience gathered under a specific context, or identified in the negative, in distinction or opposition to some other group. This is Michael Warner's claim in his analysis of the emergence of a reading public, taking as his primary example the invention of the English magazine, in the eighteenth century. A public exists, Warner (2002:67) claims, 'by virtue of being addressed', and indeed he cheerfully greets his own reader as an example of this address. Such a public may appear as if it existed prior to the act of being addressed, but this is a performative effect: 'A public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse' (90ff). At the same time, as Warner describes, this performative capacity is constrained by the material conditions of reception that are specific to a cultural place and time, to particular exclusions and inclusions, that inform what kinds of addresses can be made, and who can be audience to them.

> Public discourse says not only: 'Let a public exist,' but: 'Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way.' It then goes out in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success—success being further attempts to cite, circulate, and realize the world-understanding it articulates. Run it up the flagpole, and see who salutes. Put on a show, and see who shows up.
>
> (Warner 2002:114)

The idea that 'public' is a thing that is manufactured, that is tested and contested, became the focus of what Suzanne Lacy would describe as 'new genre public art'. A shift out of designated spaces for art and into city landscapes, domestic dwellings, and specific communities, meant that 'public' was no longer a term that could be taken for granted, but which the artist must consider as one of the things that she is making:

> Is 'public' a qualifying description of place, ownership, or access? Is it a subject, or a characteristic of the particular audience? Does it explain the intentions of the artist or the interests of the audience? The inclusion of the public connects theories of art

> to the broader population: what exists in the space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and audience, a relationship that may *itself* become the artwork.
>
> (Lacy 1995:20)

Critical writing intends a public reading. But intentionality doesn't only refer to writing that is intended to be public. Intentionality is revealed across a range of kinds of writing: a review, a piece of publicity, an email, a text message, a shopping list, a love letter. All of these start by imagining their reader, by imagining the kind of reading that that they want.

Critical writing has an intended reader, and in that intention, it makes that reader.

Some critical writing makes this explicit by taking the form of a letter addressed to a particular reader. 'Dear A,' Peggy Phelan writes to Adrian Heathfield, 'Already I am remembering you trying to remember love's beginning' (Phelan and Heathfield 2001:242). Such a public writing is like an eavesdropping, an invitation into intimacy, in which what matters is the context of readership as much as the content of the dialogue. What qualities of friendship and kindness, and also of privacy and exclusion, might the letter convey? How is this act of intimate address itself a critical intervention? In describing Marina Abramović's *The House with the Ocean View* (2002), which itself thematized ideas of public and private through Abramović's 12-day habitation of the gallery space, Phelan moves between modes of address. Her writing begins authoritatively, with a contextualizing biography of Abramović that takes care to distinguish performance art from theatre, and that gives a history of her work in relation to other performance artists and her relationship with Ulay. Then, she interrupts herself:

> Dear Marina,
> […] You asked me to enter the performance, to engage in an 'energy dialogue' with you. You asked me, a writer and a teacher, to give up talking to meet you in silence, to become wordless. You yourself were singing. I want to give you something of the melody of our encounter for it still hums in my mouth.
> Love
> Peggy
>
> (Phelan 2004:20)

After this letter, Phelan returns to her academic narrative: 'One of the achievements of body art of the 1970s […]', etc. But later, the letters return, one-sided, unanswered, but describing the arc of a relationship, an exposure and a risk in Phelan's writing that offers itself as a response to the risk and exposure inherent in Abramović's performance.

In writing this, who do you think I imagined you to be? How have I done in imagining you?

Critical writing describes a space of encounter

John Hall (2004:17–19) has described the spatiality of the written page in relation to three "field vectors": a lineating field, prescribing a normative journey from upper-left to lower-right, in which the page 'is something you pass through'; a framing field, in which the margins mark the boundary of a compositional space, a 'constellation' of signal and noise; and a mapping field, in which there might be a correspondence between the arrangement of objects on the page and one's physical encounters or enactments of them, as in a score or notation.

We can think about pages as spaces, and we can think of spaces as shaped by encounter. Geographer Doreen Massey described space not as a neutral backdrop on which events would unfold, but as constituted out of those events, created out of intersecting trajectories; the meetings of people and forces inflect and constitute what a place is.

> Place as an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories poses the question of our throwntogetherness. […] These temporary constellations of trajectories, these events which are places, require negotiation.
>
> (Massey 2005:151, 153)

How might we think spatially about the forms and shapes we use? Such as: the shape of a book, or of an online comments thread, or of a magazine through which a reader flips, perhaps back to front, and back again. Artists and makers who turn to critical writing might think about the formal decisions that shape and enable different kinds of content and encounter. If you're used to thinking spatially about materials, as artists who might work with sculptural forms, then what kinds of analogies might they suggest for the sculpting of words and spaces? As a performance-maker, how might what you know about tempo, rhythm, variation, surprise, etc. suggest possibilities for the encounter with writing?

What kind of space is a piece of writing? It is a possibility, waiting to be occupied by users, but it also gives a shape to those interactions. It has inclusions and exclusions. It is where friends meet, and where strangers find ways to talk with one another.

The project *SCRIBE*, by Australian artist Leisa Shelton (2016; see also Schmidt 2016), reimagines the often tedious ritual of audience feedback as performance in its own right. Presented as part of a performance festival, participants book a one-to-one session with a self-described scribe, who listens, converses, and records the experience in writing, drawing, or some combination of the form. The formality of the event is marked by use of objects: a specially-crafted writing desk, and the stamping of the contributions with a bureaucratic stamp and anonymized contributor number. Depending on the individual scribe and the nature of the conversation, the pages describe the range of vectors that Hall enumerates: maps of the conversations, drawings, collections of phrases that might come equivalently from a recollection of a performance-event or from the participant's everyday life. As Shelton (2016) describes, the project 'seeks to put into question hierarchies of power and enable diverse voices and experiences to be the document for artists, public and future researchers to engage with as a fuller and more layered resonant outcome of the live event.'

Meghan Vaughan has playfully experimented with hierarchy and agency in her use of the platform Twine, an online story-crafting tool that enables multiple 'choose your own adventure'-style pathways. Vaughan used this platform to respond to Jamal Harewood's *The Privileged* (2015), a piece that progressed through increasingly problematic instructions to force an audience to confront its complicity in the perpetuation of racial objectification. Vaughan's online tool restages this complicity by asking its reader to continually click to move through the writing, and to choose from divergent paths, making manifest the reader's own choices in continuing with the 'review':

> So I guess what I'm saying is this. It's up to you how you read this review. It's up to you how much of a commitment you make, how deeply you choose to participate in this piece of criticism. You can navigate it yourself, change course, even shut down your browser tab and simply walk away.
> You can give me abuse on twitter or you can write to your MP.
> You could make a home-made bomb.

> [Link, which the reader must click in order to continue:] You are empowered.
>
> (Vaughan 2015; see also Vaughan 2016)

Critical writing is 'something other'

> Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.
>
> (Phelan 1993:146)

Peggy Phelan's notorious claim for performance's constitutive ephemerality and its resistance to reproduction has been endlessly quoted and much contested. In addition his frequently cited critique of Phelan in *Liveness* ([1999] 2008), Philip Auslander argues that 'performance is always at one level raw material for documentation, the final product through which it will be circulated and with which it will inevitably become identified' (Auslander 2006:3); he describes this effect as performative, in that it is the act of documenting that constitutes an event as performance *as such* (5). Amelia Jones (2012) has also described the curious temporality of performance, in which it is often first encountered through documentation, and indeed is retrospectively dependent upon its documentation as 'necessary supplement': 'Rather than confirming the ontological coherence of the body-as-presence, body art depends on documentation, confirming – even exacerbating – the supplementarity of the body itself' (211).

In addition to these theoretical positions, there are pragmatic interests with regard to legitimacy and visibility. Critical writing is useful, even necessary, in that it provides evidence that a thing happened. In the field of Live Art, for example, the Live Art UK consortium took a deliberate position to increase variety and visibility of writing through its 'Writing from Live Art' (2006) initiative, which included me amongst its beneficiaries (described above), and has continued through numerous initiatives from the Live Art Development Agency via its 'Intellect Live' partnership and its online shop Unbound (see http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/publishing/what-is-lada-publishing). Different forms of documentation have different claims on legitimacy. A book has heft and durability, can be archived and circulated, and takes up space and visibility in its physical form: think of the size and weight of Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh's monograph in relation to the staggering scale, but near invisibility, of Hsieh's 'lifeworks' (Heathfield and Hsieh 2009). Other forms are more ephemeral but can travel more quickly or more widely, as an email or via social media. As a hybrid creative/critical practice, artist Brian Fuata tests email as performance, making use of the 'To', 'CC', and 'BCC' fields to turn readers into different kinds of audiences (see Fuata 2015). Sometimes the two are combined, as in LADA's 'Live Art Almanac' series, that 'collects and disseminates "found" writings' from a range of sources including newspaper articles, blog posts, speeches and presentations, and social media threads (Curtis et al. 2016:1).

In becoming objects that can be sold and circulated, Phelan implies that the transformation of performance into documentation is one of degradation. But the transformation into 'something other' can also be positively valued – as highlighted by writers Mary Paterson, Maddy Costa, and Diana Damian Martin in their project 'Something Other' (https://somethingother.blog/), whose appropriation of Phelan's famous phrase inspired me in writing this section. In a dialogue taking place in the multi-threaded platform of medium.com, Paterson and Costa describe their motivating impulses:

> 1) a fascination with the live event — theatre, performance, life; 2) an interest in writing as a tool, a technology, and a fabric that mediates, colours, extends and transforms (live) experience; 3) a curiosity about 'digital space' (for want of a better

> phrase), as part of life and the live, as well as between it; and 4) an interest in the differences between these three modes of being.
>
> (Paterson and Costa 2015)

Writing in this 'digital space', as Paterson puts it, mimics the liveness and ephemerality of performance (even as it is always archived and harvested for data) – for example, in the temporary community that flickers into being through 'live tweeting' during durational performance (which may also be live-streamed). During Forced Entertainment's 6-hour performance *And On the Thousandth Night…*, online magazine *Exeunt* organized a simultaneous multi-authored responsive writing project (Exeunt Magazine 2014); and a similar phenomenon occurred around the same company's *Speak Bitterness*, when, for a time, the hashtag #FESPEAKLIVE trended on Twitter; as Lyn Gardner (2014) described it, this activity 'seemed much more about an incredibly excited audience excitedly engaging both with the show but also simultaneously with each other.' And international collaboration After Performance negotiates time-zones and cultural differences in experimenting with what they describe as 'transauthorship' (After Performance Working Group 2016), including simultaneous editing of a single Google doc in which four voices add, edit, and rewrite each other (see After Performance Working Group 2017).

Critical writing can become 'something other', a practice in its own right, in both senses of 'practice': it is something to be practiced, to be cultivated; something we can get better at and make discoveries through working more closely and deeply with the task. As writers we can learn from other writers. And also: it is a practice amongst other creative practices. We can learn from other non-writing. We can find ways of using the rhythms and scores of architecture, dance, daily life. From other fields we can borrow terminology and jargon, methodological approaches, and forms of composition.

In this way, critical writing is not just 'writing', not just what we do with pen to paper or with fingers to keypad. It includes lengthy, meandering conversations and brief exchanges; resonances with associated memories, and things forgotten; thoughts we have in the dark of the theatre, when we are looking at a performance but not thinking about the performance. To be a writer is to be a listener, not just someone with something to say. To observe and to be curious, to notate and annotate. To hold a space where words matter, and silence matters, too, in the gap between seeing and thinking, hearing and replying, watching and writing.

How we talk about the work is the work.

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